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## Uncle Tom's cabin / De negerhut van oom Tom door Harriet Beecher Stowe

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### Summary

Mr Haley is visiting Mr Shelby because he wants to buy a slave, Tom. Mr Haley is a trader; Mr Shelby trusts his slaves, especially Tom. He once let Tom go to buy something, trusting that he would return! He doesn't want to sell slaves, but he has to. If he doesn't, he has to sell his entire plantage. Haley also wants another slave: a little boy named Harry. The mother of the boy overhears this and enters the room. Haley immediately



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wants her too, but Shelby can't sell Eliza. He is also having difficulties with selling Harry, and he tells Haley that his wife won't like it, but he also promises that he'll talk with her.

In the meantime, Mrs Shelby has comforted Eliza that her son won't be sold. Eliza is married to George Harris, a slave of a neighboring estate. George has been hired and he has invented a machine. His owner, Mr Harris, wants him back immediately. His master, Mr Wilson, can't do anything about that. George visits Eliza. He tells her how awful his life has become. He wishes that he had never been born and she realizes that he is better than Harris. He tells Eliza that he is planning to flee to Canada and buy here. Mr George, 13 years old, visits uncle Tom's cabin. He learns Tom how to read. Together with Aunt Chloe, they sing and read a lot.

Mr Shelby has agreed to sell Tom to the trader, on the condition that Haley promises him that he'll try to find a good place for him. Haley promises to do so. Mr Shelby tells his wife of his decision. She doesn't agree and she says that she hates slavery, but she understands after her husband's explanation. Eliza overhears it again and she decides to flee with Harry to Canada. She asks Tom to join her, but Tom is too loyal to leave Mr Shelby. 'If I must be sold, or all the people on the place, and everything go to rack, why, let me be sold'.

The Shelybys discover Eliza's flee. Mrs Shelby is very glad. Haley hears it too and she is very mad. They agree to go looking for her, but Mrs Shelby orders her slaves not to hurry. Sam, one of the slaves, makes Haley's horse flee and it takes a couple of hours to get it back. Mrs Shelby goes talking to Haley, which also takes quite a while...

Eliza is running with Harry on her arm. After a long struggle, she reaches the river. She is safe for the moment if she can get over it. She seeks help, but then she sees Haley, who is been delayed again by Sam, coming. She walks over the ice and jumps to the other side. Haley doesn't follow her, because the ice is very weak and he'd probably not make it. The next day, when Haley is in a tavern, an old friend of Haley, Tom Loker, comes by. He has another man with him, Marks, and they are both traders. Haley tells him his story and asks them if they can help him catch the boy. In return, they can have Eliza. The two men agree and after a last struggle (Tom wants a small reward before they have caught anything, because he knows Haley and he knows that he wouldn't pay then) they depart. Sam returns and

it is obvious that their masters aren't mad at him.

Senator Bird comes home. He has agreed in a law, forbidding to help slaves. Just as he is defending this law to his wife, who is strongly against it, the door is being knocked on. It is Eliza. Senator Bird forgets his law and decides to help her. He brings her to Van Trompe, a man who helps slaves.

Tom has to leave Aunt Chloe now and he tells her that he has faith in God and she must have the same. Mrs Shelby says that she'll buy him back as soon as she has the money. Tom, tied with iron balls, is being carried off by Haley. On the way, they meet master George. George gives Tom a necklace, made of a dollar.

George, Eliza's husband, enters a hotel with a slave, Jim. George is disguised as a Spanish man. Mr Wilson and some other men are also in the hotel. They are discussing an ad, in which George is 'wanted'. Mr Wilson asks George to come upstairs (Mr Wilson has recognized George). George makes Wilson promise that he'll tell Eliza that George has loved her to the end and that she must flee to Canada. (In case George dies...)

On their travel, Haley sees an ad, advertising slaves. He goes looking and he sees a few good ones. There is a mother with her child. He only buys the child, because he doesn't need the mother. He goes, with his slaves, on a boat. A few days later, he buys another slave, Lucy, with her child. He sells the child and Lucy, after hearing that, jumps off the boat. Eliza is now in the hands of Simeon Halliday, another man in her travel

north. (She goes from man to man.) While she is there, she hears the news that George will visit her that night. He does so, and that same night they travel further.

While Tom is reading in the Bible, he is visited by a little girl named Eva St. Clare. They immediately like each other. A few moments later, as Eva and her father are standing on the upper deck, Eva loses her balance and falls in the water. Tom saves her, and Eva wants her father to buy Tom. After a negotiation with Haley, her father does so.

Mr St Clare is married to Marie. After the birth of Eva, Marie's health worsened. It got so bad that St. Clare decided to ask his cousin Ophelia to come to his house. Miss Ophelia arrives and it becomes clear that the marriage of St Clare isn't very good. It also becomes clear that Marie considers negroes as 'second-class' people. She says that she, herself, is good and that she never complains, but the opposite is true!

Eva, to great distress of Marie, cares for slaves; St Clare doesn't care at all. Everyone believes in God, except St Clare (Tom worries about that). George and the other slaves are at the Quakers. Phineas, married to one of the daughters, warns them that he has heard some 'slave-catchers' talking that they know where their

victims are. George gets furious and wants to kill them. When the chance comes, he shoots Tom (the 'slave-catcher') and Tom falls down. He is injured. George feels pity with him and persuades Phineas to bring him to a safe place.

We meet Adolph, a slave-supervisor. He gets money to control the house-keeping, but instead he buys things for himself. Ophelia wants to bring the house on order. She also wants to do the kitchen. Dinah, the cook, doesn't like that at all: she has, just like St Clare, a leaning to disorder. A slave from a neighbour estate, Prue, comes to sell bread and she is drunk all the time. Tom tells her about Jesus and persuades her to become a Christian. The story goes that Prue has been whipped to death. Ophelia and St Clare are having a discussion about it: to Ophelia's surprise, St Clare looks upon slavery as something which can't be justified, but he also links it with the current situation in England. St Clare also tells his history: he has a twin-brother, Alfred, and they had to run the plantage when their parents died. (Alfred liked his father, Augustine St Clare liked his mother.) St Clare is suited for the work so he stops and takes some slaves with him. Impressed by her speech of education, St Clare buys a slave for Ophelia to be educated: Topsy. Topsy steals that and afterwards she denies that she has done it. After a while, she stops and most people like her now. Chloe has received a letter from Tom (written with help of Eva). She asks Ms Shelby if they have the money yet to buy Tom back, but they don't. She asks if she can be hired out, to make some money.

Two years later: Chloe is working for money and Eva gets interested in the Bible. Tom notices that Eva is ill, Eva answers him that she's going to heaven. She also asks Marie why she doesn't teach her servants to read.

Alfred and his son Henrique visit Augustine. Henrique is rude towards his slaves, but when he notices that Eva doesn't like that, he suddenly stops.....

They make a long ride together, which fatigues Eva much. Eva is beginning to feel worse and worse. Marie still doesn't care: she only cares for herself. Eva continues saying that she'll see Him shortly and Tom believes her. Ophelia is planning to stop her education of Topsy. St Clare says that she'd be very weak: not being able to save ONE child.

Eva calls Topsy and tells her that she'll be gone soon and that she wants her to be good. Topsy promises that she'll try. Eva asks St Clare to set Tom free after her death. When Eva is dying, she calls everyone and she gives everyone a bit of her hear: they can all remember her that way. She also asks everyone to become a Christian, especially her father. Eva dies, quite happily. Everyone is shocked by

Eva's death. Topsy because nobody loves her now, but Ophelia says she'll love her. St Clare because he doesn't know what he has done with his long life. Tom urges him to become a Christian and St Clare promises that he'll try.

St Clare is becoming a Christian and he is busy Tom free. On Ophelia's request, he makes Topsy her property. St Clare goes to a cafe to hear some news. A fight starts there and St Clare, with a few others, tries to separate the fighters, but he gets hurt.

A few hours later, he dies saying one of his prayers: he is a Christian! All the slaves are now Marie's property and she wants to sell them. Despite begging of Ophelia, Marie also wants to sell Tom, since he is the most valuable. A few slaves of St Clare, together with Susan and Emmeline, mother and daughter, are to be sold in a warehouse. The two women want to be sold together, but the buyer of Susan hasn't got enough money left. Emmeline is sold together with Tom to Simon Legree.

Legree is cruel: he throws all Tom's belongings away. He tells that most of his slaves only last a few years. Tom is meant to become an overseer, Emmeline is for Legree's own 'use'. Lucy (the mulatto woman) is meant as a wife for Sambo. (There are two rivaling negro-overseers: Sambo and Quimbo).

Lucy doesn't like her 'purpose' at all and Sambo begins to hate her. Tom finds comfort in his Bible. All the slaves have to work: they have to pick cotton. Lucy can't work hard enough, so Tom and another woman, Miss Cassy, transfer some of her basket. Sambo saw it and since he hates Lucy, he tells Legree. Legree decides that she must be whipped and he wants Tom to do that, just as practice. Tom refuses and tells Legree that his soul

belongs to the Lord, not to him. Legree orders Sambo and Quimbo to whip Tom. As Tom lies bleeding in his cabin, Cassy comes with some water. She urges Tom to give up, because he shan't ever win, but Tom says he can not. He tells her of the Lord,

Cassy answers him with her story: she is the daughter of a white man and a negro woman (mulatto) and her father intended to set her free, but he died. A man, Henry, comes and she falls in love with him. They get two children: Henry and Elise. Henry's cousin comes and together they go to a gaming-house. Henry gets debts so he has to sell Cassy and her children. Her new master tells he'll sell her children if she doesn't behave properly.

But he does sell them and a few weeks later she sees Henry. The boy runs, crying, at her and Cassy pleads at his owner, but without any results. Another man, Stuart, buys her and she falls in love with him and they get a child. Cassy had to kill the child: she couldn't bear it to let it live. Stuart died of cholera and Cassy was

sold to Legree.

Cassy lives in Legree's house. When Sambo enters with Tom's necklace, it is obvious that Legree is superstitious. Cassy visits Emmeline. Emmeline wants to flee, but Cassy tells her that that is impossible. She would be punished HORRIBLE. Cassy leaves her and goes to Simon. She tells him that he must leave Tom alone because

- it won't work

- he needs him most this season

Simon goes looking for Tom and when he sees that the whipping was useless, he agrees to wait. Meanwhile, George and the others are still at the Quakers. Tom Loker is also there. He tells that they are being looked out for: he has become a better man (and he hates Marks). George and his company (Jim and his mother have already left) disguise themselves and board a ship to cross the lake which separates them from Canada. Marks is looking for them, but he doesn't recognize them.

They arrive in Canada as Free People!

Legree visits Tom again to tell him that he, Legree, thinks God won't help Tom. Tom refuses to believe that. Tom helps everyone at work and tries to make Christians of them at Sundays. Cassy visits Tom. She tells him that he can become a free man: she has given Legree a narcotic and the door to his room is unlocked. An axe lies ready..... Tom refuses to do it. Cassy says she'll do it instead. Tom urges her not to do so and have faith in God. Finally, Cassy agrees with that.

Cassy starts frightening Legree about the garret. She speaks about ghosts and Legree gets very frightened; so frightened that he would never go there. Cassy and Emmeline flee. They can be seen by many people so they hunt begins. They run through water (to mislead the dogs) and return to the garret.

Legree is very mad. He decides that Tom knows more of all this and he lets Sambo & Quimbo get him. (They both hate Tom, because he was meant to take their places.) Legree tells Tom that he'll kill him if he doesn't tell where the gals are. Tom says he knows where they are, but that he can't tell him. He also asks Legree not to kill him; not for himself, but for Legree: his sorrow would never end.

Legree orders Sambo and Quimbo to whip Tom. When Tom is almost dead, he forgives Legree. When Sambo and Quimbo ask who Jesus is, Tom answers them and he prays to forgive these two men. After a correspondence (Mr Shelby died in

the meantime) George Shelby discovers where Tom ought to be. He goes looking for him. When he finds him, Tom is nearly dead; he says that Legree opened the door to the Kingdom for him. George takes Tom's body with him to bury it. Legree goes drinking more and more. Later, there are reports that he's dying. Cassy and Emmeline meet George on their way. Recognizing Tom, Cassy asks to travel with him. On their travel, they meet Madame de Thoux. She inquires George for Mr Harris. George tells her and hears that she's his sister. While he's talking about George's wife, Cassy faints: she is Eliza's mother.

Madame de Thoux (Emily), Cassy and Emmeline visit George. A few years later, they go to France, where George get educated. They return to America, but shortly after that, they go to Africa: that is their own race. Cassy's son also goes there. Ophelia takes Topsy with her and later Topsy becomes a missionary.

George has written when he would arrive. He hasn't written anything concerning Tom so his mother already knows the answer, but Chloe is very anxious to meet Tom. She is very shocked when she hears the news. George, just as he had promised on Tom's grave, sets all the slaves free. They don't want to leave, so George will pay them wages. Finally, he asks them to remember uncle Tom and what a Christian he was. The writer tells that all characters may have existed and she gives a few examples.

She accuses the North, that they're also guilty of slavery. Slaves can be educated and again, a few examples are given.

The book ends with the remark that both North and South and the church are guilty.

## Characters

**Tom:** about 30 (he has a little kid), he beliefs in God very strong, he has all the bad luck you can get but he never complains, he would never hurt anyone, loyal, he urges everyone to become a Christian, good Type

**Simon Legree:** alcoholic, superstitious, he wants to replace God Flat

**Cassy:** mulatto, has lost her belief but she refinds it, she has been through too much, she has the courage to flee, mother of Eliza Round

**Sambo:** negro-overseer, he hates easily, cruel, he becomes a better man as Tom is dying Flat

**St Clare:** weak man, careless, he doesn't know how to believe but at the end he does know it, good for his slaves, he looks upon slavery as an immoral thing Round

**Eva:** little girl, one of the wisest persons in the book, she beliefs and urges everyone to believe too Flat

**Ophelia:** St Clare's cousin, is a good person because she came to help St. Claire but she doesn't know how to handle things, she isn't used to it Round

**Shelby:** first owner of Tom, is a good person who wants to give his slaves a good life Flat

### **Opinion**

It's an interesting book, very touching. Sometimes it's hard to read, because of the events and also the language. It's speaking English and everyone has another way of saying it, so you get for example 6 versions of 'you'. But I can recommend it if your English is good.